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AGATHA WEBB,

A Powerful New Story By

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Just after a ball at the Sutherland mansion, Agatha Webb and her servant are found dead, and Philemon Webb, Agatha's husband, who for years has been growing demented, is discovered asleep at the dinner table. A trace of blood on his sleeve points to him as the murderer. Mr. Sutherland and the local marshal, Fenton, investigate. Agatha Webb is known to but few as a rich woman. The key to her money-drawer is found clutched in her hand. Young Sutherland is not to be found, and Miss Page, the niece of Sutherland's housekeeper, persists in remaining about the Webb premises and discovers blood on the grass. The money drawer is found to be empty and robbery is added to the mystery. Frederick Sutherland, a wayward youth, calls his father to witness his determination to be a better man and promises not to marry Miss Page, by whom he has been fascinated. Miss Page tells Frederick that she followed him the night of the murder and knew where he had secreted a thousand dollars. She gives him a week to decide whether to marry her or be proclaimed as the murderer of Agatha Webb. The whole town is stirred up by the double murder and everyone tells of the goodness of Mrs. Webb. Six children had been born to her, and all died in infancy. It is learned that the money was in new bills, and the keeper of a small store produces one that a strange man gave him late the night of the murder. A detective arrives from Boston and reports: "Simple case. Murdered for money. Find the man with a flowing beard." Suspicion falls upon one of the Zabel brothers. Frederick visits the hollow tree. The money is gone. Wattles, a Boston gambler, arrives and demands $50 of Frederick in payment of a gambling debt. Frederick secures a check for the amount from his father and that night as he is about to leave home he is stopped by Miss Page.

Confounded by this check and filled with an anger that was nigh to dangerous, he fell back and then immediately sprang forward.

"What are you doing here?" he cried. "Don't you know that it is 11 o'clock and that my father requires the house to be closed at that hour?"

"And you?" was her sole retort; "what are you doing here? Are you searching for flowers n the woods, and is that valise you carry the receptacle in which you hope to put your botanical specimens?"

With a savage gesture he dropped the valise and took her fiercely by each shoulder.

"Where have you hidden my money?" he hissed. "Tell me or"——

"Or what?" she asked, smiling into his face in a way that made him lose his grip.

"Or—or, I cannot answer for myself," he went on, stammering. "Do you think I can endure everything from you because you are a woman? No; I will have those bills, every one of them, or show myself your master. Where are they, you incarnate fiend?"

It was an unwise word to use, but she did not seem to heed it.

"Ah," she said softly, and with a lingering accent, as if his grasp of her had been a caress to which she was not entirely averse. "I did not think you would discover its loss so soon. When did you go to the woods, Frederick? And was Miss Halliday with you?"

He had a disposition to strike her, but controlled himself. Blows would not avail against the softness of this suave, yet merciless being. Only a will as strong as her own could hope to cope with this smiling fury; and this he was determined to show, though alas, he had everything to lose in the struggle, that could rob her of nothing but a hope which was but a baseless fabric at best; but he was more than ever determined never to marry her.

"A man does not need to wait long to miss his own," said he. "And if you have taken the money, which you do not deny, you have shown yourself very short-sighted, for danger lies closer to the person holding this money than to the one you may villify by your threats. This you will find, Arabel, when you come to make use of the weapon with which you have thought to arm yourself."

"Tut, tut!" was her contemptuous reply. "Do you consider me a child? Do I look like a babbling infant, Frederick?"

Her face, which she had lifted to his in saying this, was so illumined, both by her smile, which was strangely enchanting for one so evil, and by the moonlight which so etherializes all it touches, that he had to think of that other purer, truer face he had left at the honeysuckle porch to keep down a last wild impulse toward her, which would have been his undoing, both in this world and the next, as he knew.

"Or do I look simply like a woman?" she went on, and playing upon it. "A woman who understands herself and you and all the secret perils of the game we are both playing? If I am a child, treat me as a child; but if I am a woman"——

"Stand out of my way," he cried, catching up his valise and striding furiously by her. "Woman or child, you shall know that I will not be your plaything to be damned in this world and the next."

"Are you bound for the city of destruction?" she laughed, not moving, but showing such confidence in her power to hold him back that he stopped in spite of himself. "If so, you are taking the direct road there, and have only to hasten. But you had better remain in your father's house; even if you are something of a prisoner there in company with my very insignificant self. The outcome will be more satisfactory, even if you have to share it with me."

"And what course will you take?" he asked, pausing with his hand on the fence, "if I choose destruction without you, rather than perdition with you?"

"What course? Why, I shall tell Dr. Talbot just enough of what I know to prove you to be as desirable a witness in the impending inquest as myself. The result I leave to your judgment. But you will not drive me to this extremity. You will come back and"——

"Woman, I will never come back. I shall have to dare your worst in two weeks, and I will begin by daring you now. I"——

But he did not leap the fence, though he made a move to do so, for at that moment a party of men came hurrying by on the lower road, one of whom was heard to say:

"I will bet my head that we will put our hand on Agatha Webb's murderer tonight. The man who shoves $20 bills around so heedlessly should not wear a beard so long it leads to detection."

It was the coroner, the constable Knapp and Abel, en route to the forest road on which lived John and James Zabel.

Frederick and Amabel confronted each other, and after a moment's silence turned as if by a common impulse towards the house.

"What have they got in their heads?" queried she. "Whatever it is, it may serve to occupy them till the two weeks of your probation have passed."

He did not answer. A new difficulty had already entered his over-crowded life.

CHAPTER XIV.

Let us follow the party now winding up the hillside.

In a deeply-wooded spot on a side road stood the little house to which John and James Zabel had removed when their business on the docks had terminated. There was no other dwelling of greater or lesser pretension on that road, which may account for the fact that none of the persons now approaching it had been in that neighborhood for years, though it was by no means a long walk from the village in which they all led such busy lives.

The heavy shadows cast by the woods through which the road meandered were not without their effect upon the spirits of the three men passing through them, so that long before they reached the opening in which the Zabel cottage stood, silence had fallen upon the whole party. Dr. Talbot especially looked as if he little relished this late visit to his old friends, and not till they caught a glimpse of the long, sloping roof and heavy chimney of the Zabel cottage did he shake off the gloom incident to the nature of his errand.

"Gentlemen," said he, coming to a sudden halt, "let us understand each other. We are about to make a call on two of our oldest and most respected townsfolk. If, in the course of that call I choose to make mention of the $20 bill left with Loton, well and good; but if not, you are to take my reticence as proof of my own belief that they had nothing to do with it."

Two of the party bowed, Knapp, only, made no sign.

"There is no light in the window," observed Abel. "What if we find them gone to bed?"

"We will wake them," said the constable. "I cannot go back without being myself assured that no more money like that given to Loton remains in this house."

"Very well," remarked Knapp, and going up to the door before him, he struck a resounding knock that was startling in that place of silence.

But loud as the summons was, it brought no answer. Not only the moonlighted door, but the little windows on each side of it remained shut, and there was no evidence that the knock had been heard.

"Zabel! John Zabel!" shouted the constable, stepping around the side of the house. "Get up, my good friends, and let an old crony in. James! John! Late as it is, we have business with you. Open the door; don't stop to dress."

But this appeal received no more recognition than the first, and after rapping on the window against which he had flung the words he came back and looked up and down the front of the house.

It had a solitary aspect and was much less comfortable looking than he had expected. Indeed, there were signs of poverty, or at least of neglect, about the place, that astonished him. Not only had the weeds been allowed to grow over the doorstep, but from the unpainted front itself bits of boards had rotted away, leaving great gaps about the window ledges and at the base of the sunken and well-nigh toppling chimney. The moon flooding the roof showed up all these imperfections with pitiless insistence, and the torn edges of the green paper shades that half concealed the rooms within were plainly to be seen, as well as the dismantled knocker which hung by one nail to the old cracked door. The vision of Knapp with his ear laid against this door, added to the forlorn and sinister aspect of the scene and gave to the constable, who remembered the brothers in their palmy days when they were the life and pride of the town, a by no means agreeable sensation, as he advanced toward the detective and asked him what they should do now.

"Break down the door," was the uncompromising reply. "Or, wait! The windows of country houses are seldom fastened; let me see if I cannot enter by some one of them."

"Better not," said the coroner, with considerable feeling. "Let us exhaust all other means first." And he took hold of the knob of the door to shake it, when to his surprise it turned and the door opened. It had not been locked.

Rather taken aback by this, he hesitated. But Knapp showed no such scruples. Without waiting for any man's permission, he glided in and stepped cautiously but without any delay into a room the door of which stood wide open before him. The constable was about to follow when he saw Knapp come stumbling back with a face whiter than his own.

"Devilish work," he muttered, and drew the others in to see.

Never will any of them forget that sight. They had not as yet recovered, any more than the mass of their townsfolk from the shock of seeing Agatha Webb lying in her blood on the old horsehair sofa. But this—this was so unexpected and so deplorable that hardy men though they were, they succumbed without being able to resist the overpowering impression made upon them.

On the floor near the entrance lay one bdother, in a streak of moonlight, which showed every feature of his worn and lifeless face, and at a table drawn up in the centre of the room sat the other, rigid in death, with a book clutched in his hand.

Both had been dead some time, and on the faces and in the aspect of either was visible a misery that added its own gloom to the pitiable and gruesome scene, and made the shining of the great white moon, which filled every corner of the bare room, seem a mockery well-nigh unendurable to those who contemplated it. John, dead in his chair! James, dead on the floor! What could be sadder, and what more piteous?

Knapp, who of them all would naturally feel this least, was of course the person first to speak.

"Both wear long beards," said he, "but this one on the floor was doubtless Loton's customer. Ah!" he cried, pointing at the table, as he carefully crossed the floor. "Here is the bread, and—" Even he had his moments of feeling. The appearance of that loaf had stunned him: one corner of it had been gnawed off.

"A light! let us have a light!" cried Mr. Fenton, speaking for the first time since his entrance. These moonbeams are horrible; see, how they cling to the bodies as if they delighted in lighting up these wasted and shrunken forms."

"Could it have been hunger," began Abel, tremblingly following Knapp's every movement as he struck a match and lit a lantern which he had broubht in his pocket.

"God help us all, if it was!" said Fenton, in a secret remorse no one but Dr. Talbot understood. "But who could have believed it of men who were once so prosperous? Are you sure that one of them has gnawed this bread? Could it not have been"——

"These are the marks of human teeth," observed Knapp, who was examining the loaf carefully. "I declare it makes me very uncomfortable, notwithstanding it's in the line of regular experiences." And he laid the bread down hurriedly.

Meantime, Mr. Fenton, who had been bending over another portion of the table, turned and walked away to the window.

"I am glad they are dead," he muttered. "They have at least shared the fate of their victims. Take a look under that old handkerchief lying beside the newspaper, Knapp."

The detective did so. A three-edged dagger, with a curiously wrought handle, met his eye. It had blood dried on its point, and was, as no one could doubt, the weapon with which Agatha Webb had been killed.

CHAPTER XV.

"Gentlemen, we have reached the conclusion of this business sooner than I expected," announced Knapp. "If you will give me just ten minutes I will endeavor to find that large remainder of money which we have every reason to think is hidden away in this house."

"Stop a minute," said the coroner. "Let me see what book John is holding so tightly. Why," he exclaimed, drawing it out and giving it one glance, "it is a Bible."

Laying it reverently down he met the detective's astonished glance and seriously remarked:

"There is some incongruity between the presence of this book and the deed we believed to have been performed down yonder."

"None at all," quoth the detective. "It was not the man in the chair, but the one on the floor, who made use of that dagger. But I wish you had left it to me to remove that book, sir."

"You, and why? What difference would it have made?"

"I would have noticed between what pages his finger was inserted. Nothing like knowing the details, sir."

Dr. Fenton gazed wistfully at the book. He would like to have known himself on what especial passage his friend's eyes had last rested.

"I will stand aside," said he, "and hear your report when you are done."

The detective had already begun his investigations.

"Here is a spot of blood," said he. "See! on the right trouser leg of the one you call James. This connects him indisputably with the crime in which this dagger was used. No signs of violence on his body. She was the only one to receive the blow. The rest was the result of God's providence."

"Or man's neglect," muttered the constable.

"There is no money in any of their pockets, or on either wasted figure," the detective continued, after a few minutes of silent search. "It must be hidden in the room, or—look through that Bible, sirs."

The coroner, glad of an opportunity to do something, took up the book and ran hurriedly through its leaves, then turned it and shook it out over the table. Nothing fell out; the bills must be looked for elsewhere.

"The furniture is scanty," Abel observed, with an inquiring glance about him.

"Very, very scanty," assented the constable, still with that biting remorse at his heart. "There is nothing in this cupboard," remarked the detective, swinging open a door in the wall, "but a set of old china more or less nicked."

Abel started. An old recollection had come up: some months ago he had been present when James had tried to sell this set. They were all in Warner's store, and James Zabel—he could see his easy attitude yet and hear the off-hand tones with which he tried to carry the thing off—had said, quite as if he had never thought of it before, "By the by, I have a set of china that came over in the Mayflower. John likes it, but it's grown to be an eyesore to me, and if any of you hear of any one wanting such a thing send him up to the cottage. I will let the old thing go for a song." Nobody answered, and James had soon disappeared. It was the last time, Abel remembered, that he had been seen about town.

"I can't stand it," cried the lad. "I can't stand it. If they died of hunger I must know it. I am going to take a look at their larder." And before any one could stop him, he dashed to the rear of the house.

The constable would like to have followed him, but he looked about the walls of the room instead. John and James had been fond of pictures, and had once indulged their fancy to the verge of extravagance, but there were no pictures on the walls now, nor was there so much as a candlestick on the empty and dust-covered mantel. Only on a bracket in one corner there was a worthless trinket made out of cloves and beads which had doubtless been given them by some country damsel in their young bachelor days. But nothing of any value anywhere, and Mr. Fenton felt that he now knew why they had made so many visits to Boston at one time, and why they always returned with a thinner valise than they took away. He was still dwelling on the thought of the depths of misery to which highly respectable folks can sink without the knowledge of the nearest neighbors, when Abel came back looking greatly troubled.

"It's the saddest thing I ever heard of," said he. "These men must have been driven wild by misery. This room is sumptuous in comparison to the ones at the back, and as for the pantry, there is not even a scrap there a mouse could eat. I struck a match and glanced into their flour barrel. It looked as if it had been licked. I declare it makes a fellow feel sick."

The constable, with a shudder, withdrew toward the door.

"The atmosphere here is stifling," said he. "I must have a breath of outdoor air."

But he was not destined to any such immediate relief. As he moved down the hall the form of a man darkened the doorway, and he heard an anxious voice exclaim:

"Ah, Mr. Fenton, is that you? I have been looking for you everywhere."

It was Sweetwater, the young man who had previously shown so much anxiety to be of service to the coroner.

Mr. Fenton looked displeased.

"And how come you to find me here?" he asked.

"Oh, some men saw you take this road, and I guessed the rest."

"Oh, ah, very good. And what do you want, Sweetwater?"

The young man, who was glowing with pride and all alive with enthusiasm which he had kept suppressed for hours, slipped up to the constable and whispered in his ear: "I have made a discovery, sir. I know you will excuse the presumption, but I couldn't bring myself to keep quiet and follow in that other fellow's wake. I had to make investigations on my own account, and—and"— stammering in his eagerness—"they have been successful, sir. I have found out who was the murderer of Agatha Webb."

The constable, compassionating the disappointment in store for him, shook his head with a solemn look toward the room from which he had just emerged. "You are late, Sweetwater," said he, "we have found him out ourselves, and he lies inside there, dead."

It was dark in the narrow passageway, and Sweetwater's back was to the moonlight, so that the blank look which must have crossed his face at this announcement was lost upon the constable. But his consternation was evident from the way he thrust out either hand to steady himself against the walls, and Mr. Fenton was not at all surprised to hear him stammer out:

"Dead! He! Who do you mean by he, Mr. Fenton?"

"The man in whose house we now are," returned the other. "Is there any one else who can be suspected of this crime?"

Sweetwater gave a gulp that seemed to restore him to himself.

"There are two men living here, both very good men, I thought. Which of them do you mean, and why do you think that either John or James Zabel could have killed Agatha Webb?"

For reply, Mr. Fenton drew him toward the room in which such a great heart tragedy had taken place.

"Look," said he, "and see what can happen in a Christian land, in the midst of Christian people living not fifty rods away. These men are dead, Sweetwater, dead from hunger. The loaf of bread you see there came too late. It was bought with a $20 bill, taken from Agatha Webb's cupboard drawer."

Sweetwater, to whom the whole scene seemed like some horrible nightmare, stared at the figure of James lying on the floor, and then at the figure of John seated at the table, as if his mind had failed to take in the constable's words.

"Dead!" he murmured. "Dead! John and James Zabel. What will happen next? Is the town under a curse?" And he fell on his knees before the prostrate form of James, only to start up again as he saw the eyes of Knapp resting on him.

"Ah," he muttered, "the detective!" And after giving the man from Boston a close look he turned toward Mr. Fenton.

"You said something about this good old man having killed Agatha Webb. What was it? I was too dazed to take it in."

Mr. Fenton, not understanding the young man's eagerness, but willing enough to enlighten him as to the situation, told him what reasons there were for ascribing the crime in the Webb cottage to the mad need of these starving men. Sweetwater listened with open eyes and confused bearing, only controlling himself when his eyes by chance fell upon the quiet figure of the detective, now moving softly to and fro through the room.

"But why murder when he could have had his loaf for the asking?" remonstrated Sweetwater. "Agatha Webb would have gone without a meal any time to feed a wandering tramp; how much more to supply the necessities of two of her oldest and dearest friends."

"Yes," remarked Fenton, "but you forget, or perhaps never knew, that the master passion of these men was pride. James Zabel ask for bread! I can much sooner imagine him stealing it; yes, or striking a blow for it, so that the blow forever shut the eyes that saw him do it."

"You don't believe your own words, Mr. Fenton. How can you?" Sweetwater's hand was on the breast of the acqused man as he spoke, and his manner was almost solemn. "You must not take it for granted," he went on, his green eyes twinkling with a curious light, "that all wisdom comes from Boston. We in Sutherlandtown have some sparks of it, if they have not yet been recognized. You are satisfied"—here he addressed himself to Knapp—"that the blow which killed Agatha Webb was struck by this respectable old man?"

Knapp smiled as if a child had asked him this question; but he answered him good-humoredly enough.

"You see the dagger lying here with which the deed was done, and you see the bread that was bought from Loton with a $20 bill of Agatha Webb's money. In these you can read my answer."

"Good evidence," acknowledged Sweetwater, "very good evidence, when we remember Mr. Crane's story of the old man he met rushing from her gateway with something glittering in his hand. I never was so beat in my life, and yet—and yet—if I could have a few minutes of quiet thought all by myself I am certain I could show you that there is more to this matter than you think. Indeed, I know that there is, but I do not like to give my reasons till I have conquered the difficulties presented by these men having had that $20 bill."

"What fellow is this?" suddenly broke in Knapp.

"A fiddler, a nobody," quietly whispered Mr. Fenton in his ear.

Sweetwater heard him and changed in a twinkling from the uncertain, half-baffled, wholly humble person they had just seen to a man with a purpose strong enough to make him hold his head with the best.

"I am a musician," he admitted, "and I play on the violin for money whenever the occasion offers, something which you will yet congratulate yourselves upon if you wish to reach the root of this mysterious and dastardly crime. But that I am a nobody I deny, and mean that this fellow shall agree with me before this very night is over. Only give me an opportunity for considering this subject, and the permission to walk for a few minutes about this house."

"That is my prerogative," protested the detective firmly, but without any display of feeling. "I am the man employed to pick up whatever clues the place may present."

"Have you picked up all that are to be found in this room?" asked Sweetwater calmly.

Knapp shrugged his shoulders. He was very well satisfied with himself.

"Then give me a chance," prayed Sweetwater. "Mr. Fenton," he urged more earnestly. "I am not the fool you take me for. I feel, I know, I have a genius for this kind of thing, and though I am not prepossessing to look at and though I do play the fiddle, I swear there are depths to this affair which none of you have as yet sounded. Sirs, where are the $980 in bills which go to make up the clean thousand that was taken from the small drawer at the back of Agatha Webb's cupboard?"

"They are in some secret hiding place, no doubt, which we will presently come upon as we go through the house," answered Knapp.

"Umph! Then I advise you to put your hand on them as soon as possible," retorted Sweetwater. "I will confine myself to going over the ground you have already investigated." And with a sudden ignoring of the others' presence, which could only have sprung from an intense egotism or from an overwhelming belief in his own theory he began an investigation of the room that threw the other's more commonplace efforts entirely in the shade.

Knapp, with a slight compression of his lips, which was the sole expression of anger he ever allowed himself, took up his hat and made his bow to Mr. Fenton.

"I see," said he, "that the sympathy of those present is with local talent. Let local talent work, then, sir, and when you want me send to the tavern on the docks, where I will be found till I am notified that my services are no longer required."

"No, no!" protested Mr. Fenton. "This boy's enthusiasm will soon evaporate. Let him fuss away if he will. His petty business need not interrupt us."

"But he understands himself," whispered Knapp. "I should think he had been on our own force for years."

"All the more reason to see what he's up to. Wait, if only to satisfy your curiosity. I shan't let many minutes go by before I pull him up."

Knapp, who was really of a cold and unimpressionable temperament, refrained from further argument, and confined himself to watching the young man, whose movements seemed to fascinate him.

"Astonishing!" Mr. Fenton heard him mutter to himself. "He's more like an eel than a man." And, indeed, the way Sweetwater wound himself out and in through that room, seeing everything and examining everything that came under his eye, was a sight well worth any professional's attention. Pausing before the dead man on the floor, he held the lantern close to the white, worn face. "Ha!" said he, picking something from the long beard, "Here's a crumb of that same bread. Did you see that, Mr. Knapp?"

The question was so sudden and so sharp that the detective came near replying to it; but he bethought himself, and said nothing.

"That settles which of the two gnawed the loaf," continued Sweetwater.

The next minute he was hovering over the still more pathetic figure of John, sitting in the chair.

"Sad! Sad!" he murmured.

Suddenly he laid his finger on a small rent in the old man's faded vest. "You saw this, of course," said he, with a quick glance over his shoulder at the silent detective.

No answer, as before.

"It's a new slit," declared the officious youth, looking closer, "and—yes—there's blood on its edges. Here, take the lantern, Mr. Fenton, I must see how the skin looks underneath. O, gentlemen, no shirt! The poorest dockhand has a shirt! Brocaded vest and no shirt; but he don't want my pity, not now. Ah, noly a bruise over the heart. Sirs, what did you make out of this?"

As none of them had even seen it, Knapp was not the only one to remain silent.

"Shall I tell you what I make out of it," said the lad, rising hurriedly from the floor, which he had as hurriedly examined. This old man has tried to take his life with the dagger already wet with the blood of Agatha Webb. But his arm was too feeble. The point only pierced the vest, wiping off a little blood in its passage, then the weapon fell from his hand and struck the floor, as you will see by the fresh dent in the old board I am standinng on.' Have yau anything to say against that?"

Again the detective opened his lips and might have spoken but Sweetwater gave him no chance.

"Where is the letter he was writing?" he demanded. "Have any of you seen any paper lying about here?"

"He was not writing," objected Knapp; "he was reading; reading in that old Bible you see there."

Sweetwater caught up the book, looked it over and laid it down, with that same curious twinkle of his eye they had noted in him before.

"He was writing," he insisted. "See, here is his pencil." And he showed them the battered end of a small lead pencil lying on the edge of his chair.

"Writing at some time," admitted Knapp.

"Writing just before the deed," insisted Sweetwater. "Look at the fingers of his right hand. They have not moved since the pencil fell out of them."

"The letter, or whatever it was, shall be looked for," declared the constable.

Sweetwater bowed; his eyes roving restlessly into every nook and corner of the room.

"The brother, James, was the stronger," he remarked; "yet there is no evidence that he made any attempt at suicide."

"How do you know that it was suicide John attempted?" asked someone. "Why might not the dagger have fallen from James' hand in an effort to kill his brother?"

"Because the dent in the floor would have been to the right of the chair instead of to the left," he returned. "Besides, James' hand would not have failed so utterly, since he had strength to pick up the weapon afterward and lay it where you found it."

"True, we found it lying on the table," observed Abel, scratching his head in forced admiration of his old schoolmate.

"All easy, very easy," Sweetwater remarked, seeing the wonder in every eye. "Matters like those are for a child's reading, but what is difficult and what I find it hard to come by, is how the $20 bill got into the old man's hand. He found it here, but how—"

"Found it here? How do you know that?"

"Gentlemen, that is a point I will make clear to you later, when I have laid my hand on a certain clue I am anxiously seeking. You know this is new work for me and I have to advance warily. Did any of you gentlemen, when you came into this room, detect the faintest odor of any kind of perfume?"

"Perfume?" echoed Abel with a glance about the musty apartment, "Rats, rather."

Sweetwater shook his head with a discouraged air, but suddenly brightened, and stepping quickly across the floor, paused at one of the windows. It was that one in which the shade had been drawn down.

Peering at this shade he gave a grunt.

"You must excuse me for a minute," said he, "I have not found what I wanted in this room and now must look outside for it. Will some one bring the lantern?"

"I will," volunteered Knapp, with grim good humor. Indeed, the situation was almost ludicrous to him.

"Bring it around the house, then, to the ground under this window," ordered Sweetwater without giving any sign that he noticed or even recognized the other's air of condescension. "And gentlemen, please don't follow. It's footsteps I am after, and the fewer we make about the house ourselves the easier will it be for me to establish the clew I am after."

Mr. Fenton stared. What had got into the fellow?

To be continued.